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Memorial Ode: Racine College

by

Wallace Rice

MEMORIAL ODE

For the FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
of the FOUNDING *of* RACINE
COLLEGE

RACINE WISCONSIN

X JUNII MCMII

By

WALLACE RICE

Vigeat Radix!

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I

SPRING airily passing with a buoyant tread
For hastening Summer her best gift has spread,
Of delicate flowers,
That leave man thankful and his thought a-thrill,
The glowing coronal: The roses spill
Their attar on the little sill
That parts their month of June,
Recalling fortunate hours
When Summer, like a night-moth, hovers o'er
Her exquisite parterre;
Recalling earlier bliss —
Spring's fresh-faced heralds at her pageant's head:
The apple-bloom, April's anemones,
May's iris, Paschal lilies; and the breeze,
June-born, of all the year the kiss
Most sweetly breathed. These memories,
How tender-vivid to the mind, yet soon
Bedimmed as any filmy matin moon!
A twilight aureole glimmering there
Above the springtides gone
And vernal suns that shone —
To warm the earth and cheer the soul no more!
¶ So all of us,
I' the summer of our life and vigorous
With ripened manhood, come together here
To stand beside the flower-laden bed

Of boyhood and lost youth that was our Spring,
Fulfilled of recollections blossoming
Rose-like, innocent-white, with virginal flush,
Daintily golden, saffron, crimson-red;
Till, on a sudden, with misty eyes,
Grief in our throat,
We muse in sad surprise —
The madrigal we'd sing as soon a-hush
As ever ceased the note
Of startled hermit thrush —
With one deep sigh for all the grace
Of the dear days so dead,
That had been once so fully comforted
In this dear place,
This spot so wholly dear!

A laughing lad, —
Nor knew how glad! —
The morning-glories bind
Their beauties to the chapel door
And bless his matins daily o'er
With grace but half divined.

O hopes unsped,
O youth far fled,
And years with fluttering feet,
How fitly the convolvulus
Bloomed through you, frailly glorious,
Fair, evanescent, fleet!

¶ Racine: Unto her feet from the far North
A living amethystine sea comes forth,
Sleeping to-day in splendour, thundering
To-morrow 'gainst the bluffs, a lustful thing
Bent on destruction; yet with outspread wing
Ships pass, a mighty navy laden deep,
Upon the waves, awakened or asleep.
Embowering all its resonant shores are set
Huge forests where are met
In tints of malachite and chrysoprase
A myriad tossing, plumy sprays —
Of tremulous poplar, and the choiring pine,
The whispering alder, black-stoled oak,
The stately walnut in her emerald cloak,
And fragrant birch, as pale and fine
As studious youth. To swell this azure sea
The river runs, a city fair
Beside the pleasant waters meeting there,
As cunning workmen set a gem
To mark the joining of a diadem.
And here the vast-horizoned prairies come,
Full, multitudinous, with the busy hum
Of insects, and the mating-songs of birds,
And flashes of bright blossoms, lowing herds,
And clustering farmsteads filled with happy folk.
¶ The sea, the wood,

The river and the plain combine
To beautify a sacred spot, where all is good;
Where even the tiny griefs of long ago
By filtering years have all been strained away
To let a stream of limpid mirth outflow
And grant us many an old delight to-day.

Long, long our schoolboy days,
With weary storms within them
And what was poignant pain;
Yet through fond years the rays
Of sunlight sparkle in them:
There are no hours of rain;

Long vivid days alone,
Short dreamless nights a-many,
The surer joy to know —
Silver our locks have grown,
And brief the days, nor any
Still nights until we go.

III

¶ On lake and river in their frail canoe,
Through virgin forests and the trackless plain,
The black-robed priests their dauntless way pursue
That o'er the wilderness our GOD may reign;
The standard of the CROSS is here unfurled,
The wondering savage hears the blessed WORD,
And this our western land is given the world

Forever consecrated to the LORD.
The ages roll; great conflicts breed despair;
Until another band of holy men,
Whose memorable names our buildings bear,
Advance the standard of the CROSS again.
In sunshine and in shade they persevere,
Their temple structure laying deep and broad,
Their message to the world proclaiming clear:
The greater glory of the living GOD!
And not with brick and stone alone they build,
But delving deeply in the human heart
They labour that the years may see fulfilled
In souls within their care the better part.
How shall we thank them — we who here have learned
To keep within our hearts the loveliness
For which the greatest of the earth have yearned
And, finding, found not tongues enough to bless?
Through lengthening years have passed in love and truth
From this dear spot to-day in jubilee
A host of clean-mouthed lads, straight-bodied youth,
Clear-minded men, in all good modesty.
With humbleness of mind to see life whole,
One law of love toward all mankind to keep,
And, every day, in body, mind, and soul,
The harvest of the seeding here to reap.

Let us give praise to-day to those who taught
Us, loved us, made us true, but most of all
To that compassionate soul of whom the thought
Is ever highest duty's trumpet-call!

De Koven's holy life our own life crowned;
Still are we kneeling at the altar, near
His white-robed presence, as with accents clear
His tones august with mild-eyed wisdom sound.
He smiles upon us — never had he frowned
Had not our sins provoked the thought austere.
He loved us, lived and died for us, and here
We weep, for whom he shed full many a tear.

O man of God, just, merciful, white-gowned
Before the Throne, we live in holy fear
Because you taught it us; healing each wound
In childish hearts with words of lofty cheer:
And all we have and all we call renowned.
We lay in reverence at your sacred bier!

IV

¶ This is our Jubilee. Once more as boys
We leave behind the cities' desperate noise,
The ruck and pettiness of daily life,
The world's most piteous and unpitying strife,
To seek the shelter of this cloistered spot
And feel its happier lot.
We lay aside the mask of riper years

Which hides our better selves, makes bold our fears,
And keeps affection coward; we look in eyes
We loved so long ago
With gaze grown wise
And unashamed and loving, ardently;
We doff the panoply
Which men adopt lest without wile
The youthful pulse be seen
To beat, now high, now low;
We think no more upon
The pitiful distinctions we would make
Among ourselves, some granted us, few won;
And hand meets hand and smile meets smile
With the rare thought that we must slake
Our thirst at the same fountain, breathe
The same blue air, aud finally wreathe
The same sad flowers when we part.
Now lies the heart
That once was bare in innocence
Before our fellows, bare from choice;
Now we are blithesome lads who have not hence
Departed and may still rejoice,
Still champions of bat and ball and book,
Or idling in some favourite nook,
Still singing with a clear and high-pitched voice
The anthems, glees, and hymns
That lifted growing souls above this earth,
Still creatures of a thousand childish whims

With calculation lost in mirth.
¶ Yet what a change has come to us:
'T was yesterday, and "*Dulce Domum*" rang
Forth to the clouds to speed us far away
Where we had thought a marvellous
New happiness would rise; to-day
We leave our homes, without a pang
To find them half-forgotten, carolling
Domum dulcissimum unto our Queen,
In reverence at her purple robe to cling
And make our vows, for ever, to RACINE!

Jesu, who, Thyself a boy,
Smiled upon our childish joy,
May each thought of early glee
Give us deeper loyalty.

Jesu, who, Thyself a man,
Wept when manhood's woe began,
Let our later grief and tears
Bind us to more joyful years.

Jesu, who art very Lord,
Bless us gathered at this board;
Bless our brothers far away,
Sharing in our love to-day.

Jesu, boy and man and God,
When we part for paths untrod
One at heart still may we be,
Each for each, and all for Thee. *Amen.*

THE MEADOW-LARK REHEARD

THE MEADOW-LARK REHEARD
(A Reminiscence of Racine)

NTO the silent, brooding twilight swell
Three slender silver notes in fairy chime,
Calling my soul back to the earlier time
When I had loved the meadow-lark's soft bell
Yet did not know it Spring. Three notes, all sweet,
I knew, but not the budding hours that bade
Them to my ear; nor was a witless lad
To miss the Springtime so: My eyes still greet
Through dimming years that lovely morning scene
With cool, clear blue above, growing more deep
Within the pool where half the sky could steep
In its own distillations; pale clear green
Below, a plain new set with emerald;
And that sweet bird upon a tender tree
Whose leaves were little for their infancy.
From that low throne the medlark softly called
Unto my heart, and hailed the matin sun
So fitly that for years no lark could sing
Save in that gently splendid light. Still, Spring
I knew not then, nor prayed another one
Might come or might withhold, nor thought a day
Would ever end which could seem near so fair
As the brief, unconsidered radiance there
In boyhood's half-held, half-forgotten May.
¶ Ah me! but now those three soft notes I heard
Merging into the evening as the light

Of the new shimmering moon made less than bright
The phantom earthshine in her arms. The bird
I saw not; yet again in life I know
Its sweet tune ne'er 'll be heard unless for bride
Unto its beauty walks the moon beside —
The maiden moon all melody and glow —
And always in the Spring. I know Spring's wreath
Of glory now, with watching through the weeks
The slowly lengthening ray that slowlier seeks
The door to Earth's great treasury beneath
The sod, where lucent fruit and jewelled bloom
Sleep lightly till their day of beauty come;
Till Nature weeps and laughs; till bright bees hum,
And spreading trees for birds make bridal room —
I know this now, and did not know it then
Nor care. Then all the year was Spring. Then Spring
Was in my heart and soul; and larks could sing,
Or snows could fall, or mortal woes stir men,
And leave me heedless, happy, and a boy.
¶ And now, because the gold-breast songster creeps
Into my life anew; because there leaps
Into my later thought that earlier joy;
Therefore a riper happiness is born to me,
And visions twain, best of all Time has spun,
Are mine henceforth: The lark and the matin sun
When every moment meant felicity;
The lark and westering moon after salt tears
Had found me. Yesterday the thought of Spring
Without was all I had within; to-day I sing
Those tender notes sweet through the years.

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